



**Department of
Education**

Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

P.S. 176 Ovington

Elementary School 20K176

**1225 69th Street
Brooklyn
NY 11219**

Principal: Elizabeth Culkin

**Date of review: November 20, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Debra R. Lamb, Ed.D.**

The School Context

P.S. 176 Ovington is an elementary school with 1414 students from pre-kindergarten through grade five. The school population comprises 1% Black, 20% Hispanic, 20% White, and 59% Asian students. The student body includes 18% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 97%.

School Quality Criteria

| Instructional Core | | |
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| <i>To what extent does the school...</i> | Area of: | Rating: |
| 1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards | Additional Findings | Well Developed |
| 1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products | Additional Findings | Well Developed |
| 2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels | Additional Findings | Well Developed |
| School Culture | | |
| <i>To what extent does the school...</i> | Area of: | Rating: |
| 3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations | Focus | Well Developed |
| Systems for Improvement | | |
| <i>To what extent does the school...</i> | Area of: | Rating: |
| 4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning | Celebration | Well Developed |

Area of Celebration

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| Quality Indicator: | 4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development | Rating: | Well Developed |
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Findings

The great majority of teachers engage in structured professional collaborations during which pedagogical practice, assessment data, and student work is analyzed. These teams continually engage in distributed leadership practices.

Impact

Implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) has increased school-wide instructional coherence and student capacity. The school's professional collaborations and distributed leadership structures have strengthened the instructional capacity of teachers as well as their involvement in school decision making.

Supporting Evidence

- A strong professional learning community exists at P.S. 176. Teacher teams regularly engage in collaborative inquiry that supports goals, strengthens teacher capacity, and supports a positive culture of trust. "We're comfortable with each other," said a teacher. During weekly professional learning time, teachers engage in book clubs to examine literature and research to enhance their pedagogical practice. During a grade four teacher team meeting, a teacher proudly shared a Sketch Book with a variety of teaching strategies, which she consistently uses as both a resource and a reflective tool to think about her teaching.
- Common planning time enables grade teams and specialists to meet regularly to discuss CCLS-aligned units of study, student engagement activities, and to analyze student work. Teachers have regular dialogue about moving the bottom or top third of students. During a grade four team meeting, teachers discussed student goals and looked for trends in samples of high, medium, and low student work. Teachers stated, "As a grade, text structure was always a huge issue." Teachers created small group mini-lessons to address trends noticed in student opinion writing samples, such as a lack of lead and ending sentences and no differentiation between evidence and reasons. Teachers discussed best practices to address these trends. They also discussed the upcoming literary essay and historical fiction units, and how they would help students transfer skills learned from the prior units. A teacher added, "Our job is to push student thinking." After working with students on using boxes and bullets to organize their thesis and reasons, using precise details and facts to support their writing, and on the skill of elaboration, grade four teachers reported an increase in student progress as measured by outcomes on the opinion writing rubrics.
- Collaborative teams are facilitated by grade leaders and teachers rotate team roles and responsibilities across grades. Grade leaders collaborate to share the work of their grade teams with their colleagues and leadership by email, and meet with school leaders monthly to discuss issues of school-wide importance, such as the focus of professional development. Grade leaders also turnkey instructional practices learned during Teacher's College trainings and the network's monthly Ambassador Workshops. Teachers serve as lab site specialists in each subject area who host peer intervisitations. There are also buddy teachers for novice teachers or teachers new to a grade. Buddy teachers are a peer resource for questions about curriculum, pacing, and school routines. Principal Culkin stated, "It's more powerful when a teacher is hearing information from a colleague."

Area of Focus

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| Quality Indicator: | 3.4 High Expectations | Rating: | Well Developed |
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Findings

School leaders consistently convey high expectations to the entire staff and provide quality training to help meet these expectations. A culture for learning exists that communicates high expectations for all students

Impact

School leaders foster a culture of mutual accountability for high expectations. Communications support learning to ensure success and higher achievement for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- The school communicates high expectations to staff, inclusive of training and a system of accountability. During faculty conferences, teachers are informed of supervisory assignments, lesson plans expectations, training opportunities, safety and emergency measures, academic and behavior intervention practices, collaborative team meetings, and program schedule changes. During the initial planning and end of year conferences with teachers, school leaders discuss expectations and goals for the year, observation options, Measures of Teacher Practice and Measures of Student Learning. Teachers have multiple opportunities for professional development to support student independence. Teacher leaders participate in a Teacher's College specialty group focused on text complexity. Many teachers also participated in a summer Orton-Gillingham workshop series to improve instruction for students experiencing difficulties with reading and writing.
- The school communicates with families in 47 languages and supports families' understanding of high expectations for college and career readiness. Each teacher has a class webpage where they post information about homework, testing, projects, monthly units of study, and a wide-range of resources. Every Tuesday, the school hosts parent workshops on strategies for supporting their child's reading, writing, and mathematics skills at home. On the first Friday of each month, parents can take part in lessons to promote active engagement between parent and child and everyone in the building participates in activities like book walks, author celebrations and publishing parties. During this time, students also model instructional practices for their parents. One parent stated, "At parent-teacher association meetings, the principal shares strategies for vocabulary development and prompts for questioning." Another parent said, "Although the math is difficult, my daughter feels prepared for middle school." Although parents receive monthly instructional goals, parents said they missed receiving interim progress reports from the school as they did last year. They also complained about district-wide inconsistency across schools in grading policies, which impacts middle school admission decisions for their children.
- Staff supports high expectations by making sure that students understand what the grade expectations are, what they mean, and how it looks to meet them. Teachers craft feedback aligned to student-friendly rubrics so students know their next learning steps. They celebrate student strengths and support student needs as learners. Teachers expose students to different careers and share their own career experiences to promote behaviors like persistence, good work habits, organizational skills, collaboration and self-regulation. They talk about how these skills are needed in adult life and regularly ask students, "How are you going to change the world?" Students' participation as table captains and mentors as well as in parent-teacher conferences promotes ownership in their learning.

Additional Findings

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| Quality Indicator: | 1.1 Curriculum | Rating: | Well Developed |
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that CCLS-aligned curricula strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Rigorous habits and higher-order skills are emphasized in curricula and academic tasks and embedded in a coherent way across grades and subjects. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact

There is coherence across grades and subjects, enabling all students to access the curricula. The curriculum incorporates cognitively engaging tasks through which students must demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers collaboratively refined the school's interdisciplinary curriculum, which is a strategic blending of research-based programs that address the school community's values, student needs, and the instructional goals of P.S. 176. The resulting curriculum maps reflect literacy units from Teachers College Reading & Writing Program (TCRWP), Exemplars, and Words Their Way, together with mathematics modules from TERC: Investigations in Number, Data, and Space and EngageNY. The school has recently begun a new mathematics initiative called Real Math that helps students apply mathematical concepts through the work of architects, engineers, contractors, craftsmen, and financial analysts. Science and literacy are integrated in the school's Full Option Science System (FOSS) Seeds of Science/Roots of Reading Program. The school is also excited about a new Robotics initiative that will deepen Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)-related learning activities. These curricular units engage students in creative, rigorous, and reflective inquiry where questioning, problem solving, reflection, and real-world connections are incorporated across grades and content areas.
- To support the development of rigorous habits and higher order thinking skills, teachers integrate critical thinking activities into lesson plans. For example, a grade four social studies lesson plan for a unit focused on Colonial America focuses on the factors that influence the political, economic and religious systems people develop when settling a new territory. Students read a first-hand account of English settlers in Jamestown during a period of forced starvation during the winter of 1609-1610. Through the use of this primary source document, together with pictorial images, cooperative learning, strategic questioning, open-ended class discussions, differentiated center work, and technology applications, students were able to comprehend the dire hunger experienced by the settlers. Critical and creative thinking skills are also supported through the school's participation in such initiatives as the international Future Problem Solvers Program.
- The curriculum incorporates learning objectives that promote student problem solving and exemplars to ensure access to curricula and cognitive engagement for all students. During the curriculum development process as well as during ongoing unit and lesson planning, teachers use Hess' Cognitive Rigor Matrix to ensure that individual and groups of students acquire the rigorous skills and knowledge needed for readiness at the middle school level and beyond. Lesson plans include questions that specifically aim for Depth of Knowledge levels three and four. A grade four class studying character development learn such vocabulary words as traits, evidence, envision, theory, and prediction.

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| Quality Indicator: | 1.2 Pedagogy | Rating: | Well Developed |
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Findings

Teaching practices are aligned to the curricula in the great majority of classrooms. Teaching strategies provide multiple entry points and high quality supports and extensions into the curricula. Student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking, participation, and ownership.

Impact

Teaching practices reflect a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best. All learners are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstrate higher-order thinking skills that yield high quality student work.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers hold shared beliefs about student-centered teaching and student accountability for their own learning and behavior. A year-long professional development calendar focused on strengthening reading instruction and fostering student independence has been developed. The topics are aligned to curricula and pedagogical best practices and are informed by Danielson's Framework for Teaching. A focus on the quality of planning and preparation as well as questioning and discussion techniques for the past two years has yielded growth in student ownership and depth in the level of student conversation. Checklists used by students prior to turning in work demonstrate student accountability for their own learning. A grade four student's response to feedback on her writing on the topic of bullying was "My goal is to work on elaboration because I need to explain more and talk more about my topic."
- Teaching strategies provide multiple entry points that engage all learners. Attention is given to incorporating visuals, charts, hands-on activities, and experiences in every unit. Tri-folds on desks enable individuals and groups of students to access learning supports like conversation prompts, and students engage in peer editing. Students with special needs are strategically grouped or partnered with other students to learn collaboratively. Said one grade three student, "When we're not doing good in class, the teacher puts us with someone who can help." In a grade two Instructional Co-Teaching (ICT) class, a posted statement reads "I can sort by color, size, and texture" and student groups work on differentiated tasks to understand describing words. The teachers' lesson plan states the rationale for each individual student's group assignment. One group charts the texture of different objects and categorizes them as soft, smooth, rough, hard, or bumpy. Another group works with a paraprofessional to draw and label the parts of leaves using two different informational checklists. One co-teacher uses a paper hand with different textured fingers for students to touch, while the second co-teacher helps students understand the practice of labeling.
- "Everything here is built on kids doing," said Principal Culkin. Grade four students employ learned note-taking strategies within their notebooks in tabs labeled "social issues, economy, government, and geography." Student notes on social issues described how only 60 of 400 people survived the period known as "The Starving Time." They wrote about the mountainous geography of the Wampanoag home site. They chose videos to watch and used prompts like "I'm noticing that...", "I'm curious about...", and "This reminds me of..." to "grow ideas." Representatives from Colonial Williamsburg visited the school to support grade four's unit on Colonial America. In grade five, teachers have provided opportunities for some students to prepare mini-lessons to share with peers in small groups and develop their own teaching strategies. As one teacher said, "If they can teach it, they own it."

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| Quality Indicator: | 2.2 Assessment | Rating: | Well Developed |
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Findings

Teachers at each grade level create and use common assessments, rubrics and tasks, and rigorously analyze the resulting data to identify gaps in learning, targeting prescriptive instructional strategies to address these needs. Teachers use varied checks for understanding and student self-assessment practices on an ongoing basis.

Impact

Actionable and meaningful feedback on student achievement is provided to students and teachers. All students have demonstrated increased mastery. Teachers make effective adjustments to meet all students' learning needs and students are aware of their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- Curricula-aligned assessment practices provide actionable feedback. For example, the student assessment rubrics used in the Exemplars program have four levels of performance: novice, apprentice, practitioner (meets the standard) and expert. Feedback to students from teachers provides areas of strength as well as advice for next steps.
- Teachers monitor the progress of individual students using TCRWP benchmark reading assessments and Independent Reading Levels progression data, and make curricular and instructional adjustments based on these assessments of student performance as well as student self-reported levels of understanding. "Scaffolding and enrichment is consistently done through professional development, looking at data, and listening to kids," said Principal Culkin. Frequently during instruction, teachers use a variety of individual and whole group checks for understanding to compile data on which students are having trouble and the specific areas of struggle.
- Teachers use student self-assessment strategies across content areas. Teachers enable students to self-assess using such strategies as "green-yellow-red" (I got it! I almost got it! I didn't get it) or "3...2...1..." (three things I learned, two things I want to know more about, and one thing I found challenging and need more work on) to communicate their understanding. A checklist for information-writing development required writers to self-assess by checking "Not Yet," "Starting to..." or "Yes," in response to such statements as "I made choices about organization and might have used compare/contrast, cause/effect, or pro/con," or "When it felt right to do so, I chose interesting comparisons and used figurative language to clarify my points." A checklist used during group or partner work in a kindergarten class asks "Did we draw pictures?" "Did we write some numbers or words?" and "Did we agree on an answer?"
- Students use peer-assessment strategies to provide feedback to their classmates. As feedback on his classmate's written paper, a grade four student wrote, "I think you should work more at the craft. You should also work on your ending. But it is not that bad." The teacher's feedback to the same student was, "I like how you included samples to support your opinion. Next time, let's try to work on forming a thesis with reasons." In another grade four classroom, a student wrote the following feedback on a classmate's personal narrative: "I visited Coney Island with my family too! Such a fun place! I love your details about your day. Maybe we can try to add some dialogue between you and your dad." A group of grade three students use a kid-friendly rubric to score a classmate's mathematical thinking displayed in an Exemplars problem. Using a feedback template, the group's recorder writes, "You got a four because you drew an array and a number sentence. You also wrote a sentence using words. Next time, you can label the arrays."